DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 105 637 95 EA 007 077

AUTHOR Thompson, June E.; And Others
TITLE Failures of Communication in the Evaluation of Teachers by Principals. Technical Report No. 43.
INSTITUTION Stanford Univ., Calif. Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO TR-43
PUB DATE Apr 75
CONTRACT NE-C-00-3-0062
NOTE 27p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.95 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Criteria; *Evaluation Methods; Organization; *Principals; Statistical Analysis; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Evaluation; *Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how the evaluation of teachers by principals is hampered by difficulties in communication. The 131 teachers and 33 principals questioned did not agree on how much teachers knew about the way they were evaluated. Nor did they agree on the frequency of evaluations; the teachers reported less frequent evaluation than the principals believed they communicated. The lower the frequency of communicated evaluations reported by teachers, the more dissatisfied were the teachers and the less helpful were the evaluations in improving the quality of their teaching. Two schools were selected for more intensive examination. They differed dramatically in the frequency of evaluation by principals, and the pattern of findings in the two natural settings strongly supported the results of the statistical analysis of the larger sample. The current very low frequency of teacher evaluations in many schools is not providing adequate guidance for teachers. An increase in the frequency of evaluation would increase teacher satisfaction, increase the teachers' belief that evaluations can provide helpful guidance, and decrease the teachers' sense of threat to their professional autonomy. (Author)

ED105637

STANFORD CENTER
FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
IN TEACHING

Technical Report No. 43

FAILURES OF COMMUNICATION IN THE EVALUATION OF TEACHERS BY PRINCIPALS

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Stanford, California

April 1975

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Published by the Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching, supported in part as a research and development center by funds from the National Institute of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Contract No. NE-C-00-3-0062). The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position, policy, or endorsement of the National Institute of Education.

EA 007 077

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The research reported here was conducted in association with the studies of evaluation and authority within the Environment for Teaching Program.

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Abstract

This paper describes the way in which the evaluation of teachers by principals is hampered by difficulties in communication. The 131 teachers and 33 principals questioned did not agree on how much teachers knew about the way they were evaluated. Nor did they agree on the frequency of evaluations; the teachers reported less frequent evaluation than the principals believed they communicated. The lower the frequency of communicated evaluations reported by teachers, the more dissatisfied were the teachers and the less helpful were the evaluations in improving the quality of their teaching.

Two schools were selected for more intensive examination. They differed dramatically in the frequency of evaluation by principals, and the pattern of findings in the two natural settings strongly supported the results of the statistical analyses of the larger sample.

The current very low frequency of evaluations of teachers in many schools is not providing adequate guidance for teachers. An increase in the frequency of evaluation would increase teacher satisfaction, increase the teachers' belief that evaluations can provide helpful guidance, and not threaten their professional autonomy.

FAILURES OF COMMUNICATION IN THE EVALUATION OF TEACHERS BY PRINCIPALS

June E. Thompson, Sanford M. Dornbusch, and W. Richard Scott

The evaluation of teacher performance, whether by students, other teachers, or administrative superiors, is central to improving the quality of teaching. Since elementary and secondary schools combine bureaucratic and professional authority systems, both principals and teachers participate in the evaluation system. The strain between professional and bureaucratic principles of organization is not unique to educational organizations, but it is found in every professional bureaucracy (Dornbusch and Scott, 1975). Some of our other studies, not reported here, focus on collegial evaluations of teachers (Marram, 1971; Marram et al., 1972). This paper, which summarizes the findings of part of a larger study (Thompson, 1971), focuses on the evaluation of teachers by principals, thereby emphasizing administrative control. In this paper, we will describe the way in which the evaluation of teachers by principals is hampered by difficulties in communication between principals and teachers.

As a result of our statistical analyses we found, first, that there was little agreement between teachers and principals on how much

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teachers knew about the criteria and information used by principals as bases for evaluating teachers. Second, we found differences between teachers and principals in the perceived frequency with which evaluations were communicated. Third, we found that the lower the frequency of communicated evaluations, the lower the level of teacher satisfaction. Finally, when teachers reported a lower frequency of communicated evaluations, they were less likely to feel that evaluations improved the quality of teaching.

These findings were confirmed by a more intensive study of part of the original sample. The two schools used for this purpose differed dramatically in the quality of their leadership, and the difference was reflected in the teachers' perceptions.

Methods of Data Collection

Questionnaires were administered to all of the 33 experienced principals in three districts, and to 131 teachers--85 percent of the teachers in one of those districts. Most students in the three districts were white and middle-class, although one school district had a sizable proportion of minority students.

Data were collected from the teachers at faculty meetings. Members of the research team introduced the questionnaire and answered questions. (The attendance of teachers at these faculty meetings, approximately 85 percent, was not lower than usual.) Examination of the characteristics of participants and non-participants with respect to such variables as union affiliation disclosed no significant differences. Data from the principals were gathered in individual

interviews held after the principals had completed their questionnaires. Only principals who had served more than one year in their current position, 33 of 41, were interviewed.

A possible pitfall was introduced by this sample, since we went to three districts to get an adequate sample of principals and to only one district to get our sample of teachers. To determine whether error was introduced by this disparity, we made a later study of a small sample of teachers in those two additional districts. From the results of the whole sample, we took twelve statistically significant differences between principals and teachers and checked the applicability of these differences to the small sample in the two additional districts. Out of the twelve, ten were again statistically significant in the same direction, while two were not statistically significant, but were in the same direction. Therefore, the use of additional districts in the sample of principals did not produce a major source of bias in our findings.

The Tasks to Be Evaluated

We studied the evaluation of four tasks involved in teaching (Marram, 1971). They were defined as:

1. Teaching Subject Matter: including lecturing, preparing lesson plans, leading discussions, examining and grading students on their knowledge of subject matter.

2. Character Development: including emphasis on interpersonal relations, morality, manners, and social skills.

3. Maintaining Control: including keeping the attention of a class on their work, keeping down the noise level, and preventing interference with other classes.

4. Record Keeping: encompassing taking attendance, reporting absentees or latecomers, turning in grades accurately and on time, and maintaining administrative records.

By dividing the tasks of teachers into these four major areas, we were able to produce, among both teachers and principals, generally understood and meaningful divisions of the complex role of the teacher. Our theory of evaluation and authority (Dornbusch and Scott, 1975) is task-specific (Scott et al., 1967), and these tasks adequately sample the range of teacher behavior.

Methods of Analysis

We used chi-square and gamma as measures of the differences between these groups of teachers and principals. Chi-square was used to assess whether differences were due to chance. Gamma was the non-parametric measure of the degree of association between variables. To compare teachers and principals with respect to an aspect of the evaluation process, we combined all the responses to the questionnaires (both principals' and teachers') and divided them at the median into "high" and "low" categories. The responses to most of the questions ranged from "Very frequently" to "Never" or from "Always" to "Never" on seven-point scales, and from "Extremely" to "Not at all" on a five-point scale. We paid no attention to status (i.e., to whether the respondent was a principal or a teacher) in deciding what was a high or low response. When there were numerous cases in the category that contained the median, it was impossible to divide at a point which produced approximately equal cases "high" and "low," but the

procedure always mechanically came as close as possible to that ideal. If the two groups did not differ in their responses, then the proportion of principals and the proportion of teachers who would be high and low would, in both cases, be about fifty percent But if there was indeed a difference between teachers and principals in their responses to a particular question, the proportions of highs and lows would differ. The size of the gamma, ranging from .00 to 1.00, would indicate the strength of the association between principal or teacher status and the variable being analyzed. A high gamma would mean a high proportional reduction in error in ranking cases on a variable when we were given knowledge of status (Costner, 1965).

Essentially, then, we used qualitative measures of association applied to survey data. The relationships we found were strong and consistent with our theoretical perspective, but we must note that, as in any survey analysis, we cannot state that we have employed an experimental approach in which the direction of causation is clear.

A Comparison of Teacher and Principal Perceptions

We hypothesized that principals would believe that teachers knew more about the criteria used in evaluation than teachers would report knowing. Table 1 shows that there was, in fact, little agreement between teachers and principals regarding teachers' knowledge of criteria for the evaluation of the four teaching tasks. Teachers were asked, "Do you have any idea what criteria (standards) your principal uses to determine how well or poorly you are doing on each task or any

part of it? (Yes or No) Principals were asked, "To what extent do teachers have knowledge of the criteria you use to determine how well or poorly they are doing on each task or any part of it?" (A Great Deal, Considerable, Some, Little, or No Knowledge) Principals believed

TABLE 1

A Comparison of Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of Teacher Knowledge of Criteria Used to Evaluate Four Tasks

Task	Teacher Knowledge of Criteria High N (%)	Low N	Gamma
Teacher Subject Matter			
Principals	32 (97%)	1	
Teachers	69 (53%)	62	.93
Character Development			
Principals	32 (100%)	0	
Teachers	56 (43%)	74	1.00
Maintaining Control			
Principals	32 (97%)	1	
Teachers	82 (63%)	48	.89
Record Keeping			
Principals	32 (97%)	1	
Teachers	67 (52%)	62	.93

that teachers had more knowledge than teachers reported having, reporting that teachers had "Some" to "A Great Deal" of knowledge of criteria when the teachers reported having none. The gammas were extremely high and statistically significant, indicating a substantial failure of communication for this aspect of the evaluation process. Without knowledge of the criteria of evaluation, the teachers surely had

difficulty changing their behavior in order to raise the level of their evaluations. Thus the purpose of the evaluation was vitiated by this lack of knowledge of criteria.

Another of our predictions concerned teachers' knowledge of the information used in the evaluation process. We predicted that principals would believe that teachers knew more about the information used in evaluation than teachers would report knowing. Teachers were asked, "Do you have any idea what information is selected or collected by your principal to determine how well or poorly you are doing on each task?" (Yes or No) Principals were asked, "To what extent do teachers have knowledge of the information you select or collect to determine how well or poorly they are doing on each task?" (A Great Deal, Considerable, Some, Little, or No Knowledge) Table 2 shows that there was little agreement between teachers and principals regarding the extent to which teachers knew what information was selected for each of the four teaching tasks. Principals believed that teachers knew more about information collected than teachers reported knowing. Again the gammas were high and statistically significant, and the disagreement was obvious. We found, then, that teachers thought they had less knowledge of the information used for evaluation than the principal thought they had. Our theory and studies have indicated that such deficiencies in communication have as one consequence the inability of participants to shape their behavior in order to raise their evaluations. This is a breakdown in the system designed to control or regulate behavior.

TABLE 2

A Comparison of Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of Teacher Knowledge of Information Used to Evaluate Four Tasks

Task	Teacher Knowledge of Selected Information High N(%)	Low N	Gamma
Teaching Subject Matter			
Principals	33 (100%)	0	1.00
Teachers	72 (55%)	58	
Character Development			
Principals	32 (97%)	1	.96
Teachers	51 (39%)	79	
Maintaining Control			
Principals	33 (100%)	0	1.00
Teachers	84 (65%)	46	
Record Keeping			
Principals	32 (97%)	1	.92
Teachers	71 (55%)	59	

We next hypothesized that principals and teachers would disagree on how frequently evaluations were communicated to the teacher. Teachers were asked how frequently they learned their principal's evaluation of their work, and principals were asked how frequently they communicated their evaluations to the teachers. Table 3 shows that principals reported communicating their evaluations much more frequently than teachers reported receiving them. This same disparity appears in the communication of a principal's dissatisfaction with a teacher's performance (see Table 4). Again, principals felt that they communicated dissatisfaction to teachers on the four teaching tasks more frequently than teachers reported receiving criticism. The significance of these findings

TABLE 3

A Comparison of Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of the Frequency with which Principals Evaluate Four Tasks

Task	Frequency of Evaluation High N(%)	Low N	Gamma
Teaching Subject Matter			
Principals	29 (88%)	4	.80
Teachers	57 (44%)	73	
Character Development			
Principals	28 (88%)	4	.81
Teachers	55 (42%	75	
Maintaining Control			
Prinicpals	28 (88%)	4	.82
Teachers	50 (38%)	80	
Record Keeping			
Principals	28 (88%)	4	.83
Teachers	50 (38%)	80	

TABLE 4

A Comparison of Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of the Frequency of Principal Dissatisfaction for Four Tasks

Task	Perceived Principal Dissatisfaction High N(%)	Low N	Gamma
Teaching Subject Matter			
Principals	31 (94%)	2	.75
Teachers	41 (31%)	90	
Character Development			
Principals	30 (91%)	3	.76
Teachers	39 (30%)	92	
Maintaining Control			
Principals	31 (94%)	2	.66
Teachers	37 (28%)	94	
Record Keeping			
Principals	30 (91%)	3	.58
Teachers	43 (33%)	88	

is discussed in the next two sections of this report, where connections will be made between frequency of the communicated evaluation and teacher satisfaction and between the frequency of communicated evaluation and helpfulness in improving teaching performance.

Evaluations and Teacher Satisfaction

Our studies show that many schools do not have an effective system of evaluation. Principals believed that teachers were more satisfied with the overall process of evaluation and task assignment than the teachers actually were, as shown in Table 5. Some principals attributed deficiencies in their systems of evaluation to their fear that teachers would be

TABLE 5

A Comparison of Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of Teacher Satisfaction with Assignment and Evaluation of Four Tasks

Task	Teacher Satisfaction High N(%)	Low N	Gamma
Teaching Subject Matter			
Principals	28 (88%)	4	.76
Teachers	62 (48%)	66	
Character Development			
Principals	28 (88%)	4	.79
Teachers	57 (45%)	71	
Maintaining Control			
Principals	30 (94%)	2	.90
Teachers	55 (43%)	73	
Record Keeping			
Principals	29 (91%)	3	.86
Teachers	53 (41%)	75	

dissatisfied with frequent evaluations and therefore would resist them. We can hypothesize that this fear prevents principals from frequently using evaluations and thereby improving the content and the effectiveness of evaluations.

Ironically, the frequency of communicating evaluations proved to be a major factor in teacher satisfaction with evaluations. Our data confirmed the hypothesis that teachers are more satisfied when they are evaluated more frequently. Table 6 depicts the relationship between the frequency of evaluation and the level of teacher satisfaction. Teachers did not resist frequent evaluations; in fact, they were more satisfied with frequent evaluations.

TABLE 6

Relationship Between Teacher Satisfaction with Assignment and Evaluation of Tasks and Teacher Perception of the Frequency of Evaluation by Principals, for Four Tasks

Teacher Satisfaction by Task	Frequency of Principal Evaluation High N(%)	Low N	Gamma
Teaching Subject Matter			
High	39 (63%)	23	.68
Low	16 (24%)	50	
Character Development			
High	38 (61%)	24	.68
Low	15 (23%)	51	
Maintaining Control			
High	35 (56%)	27	.68
Low	13 (20%)	53	
Record Keeping			
High	39 (74%)	14	.55
Low	36 (48%)	39	

Part of the problem of developing effective systems of evaluations is the need for constructive criticism within the schools. In order to determine whether or not teachers resent negative evaluations, we examined the relationship between teacher satisfaction and negative evaluations as perceived by teachers. In the task areas of Teaching Subject Matter, Character Development, and Record Keeping, we found no significant relationship between teacher satisfaction and the frequency of dissatisfaction communicated to teachers by the principal. In the areas of Maintaining Control, however, we did find a significant relationship: the least satisfied teachers indicated the lowest frequency of receiving negative evaluation (see Table 7).

TABLE 7

Relationship of Teachers' Satisfaction to Frequency of Principals' Expressed Dissatisfaction, for Four Tasks

Teacher Satisfaction by Task	Frequency of Principal Dissatisfaction		Gamma
	High N(%)	Low N	
Teaching Subject Matter			
High	25 (40%)	38	.34
Low	16 (24%)	50	
Character Development			
High	15 (29%)	36	.13
Low	17 (24%)	54	
Maintaining Control			
High	31 (56%)	24	.61
Low	17 (23%)	56	
Record Keeping			
High	12 (26%)	35	.04
Low	19 (27%)	51	

These findings, therefore, show (1) that frequent negative evaluations do not dissatisfy teachers and (2) that the more frequently teachers are evaluated, the higher their level of satisfaction.

The finding that teachers see frequent evaluations as desirable could have a significant impact on administrators who are fearful of teacher disapproval. Since many teachers have taken more pride in their professionalism recently, many principals are understandably concerned that teachers might view frequent evaluations as a threat to their autonomy and their freedom. Our data, on the other hand, show that rather than creating hostility, frequent evaluations are looked on favorably by teachers.

There is another characteristic of evaluation that is directly related to teacher satisfaction. This factor is the perceived constructiveness of the evaluation. Table 8 delineates a positive

TABLE 8

Relationship of Helpfulness of Evaluations to Teacher Satisfaction, for Four Tasks

Helpfulness by Task	Teacher Satisfaction High N(%)	Low N	Gamma
Teaching Subject Matter			
High	48 (75%)	16	.84
Low	13 (21%)	50	
Character Development			
High	45 (70%)	19	.83
Low	11 (17%)	52	
Maintaining Control			
High	41 (64%)	23	.74
Low	13 (21%)	50	
Record Keeping			
High	47 (64%)	27	.69
Low	15 (24%)	48	

relationship between perceived helpfulness of evaluations and satisfaction of the teacher. In essence, teachers who find that evaluations assist them in their teaching are more likely to be satisfied than those who do not find them helpful.

The Frequency of Evaluations and Their Helpfulness

Teacher evaluations currently received in the public schools are so infrequent that teachers are, as we have shown, almost eager for increased attention. So far we have demonstrated that more frequent communication of evaluation is associated with greater teacher satisfaction. But teacher satisfaction is only important insofar as it makes certain organizational arrangements possible without undue conflict. What is of most direct importance to the improvement of teaching is to show that the frequency of evaluation is directly related to the quality of the teaching itself. In this paper, we have no direct measure of teaching quality, but we do have the teachers' perceptions of the impact of evaluations upon the quality of their teaching performance.

We asked the following question: "How helpful are the evaluations you receive in improving your performance?" This was potentially a poor question because of the possibility that teachers would respond, not in terms of the current evaluation process in which they were participating, but in terms of how helpful the few evaluations they received were, or even how helpful evaluations would be were they to receive any. Both of these possible misinterpretations would reduce the predicted correlation between teachers' perceptions of the frequency

of evaluation and the helpfulness of evaluations in improving their teaching.

We asked the teachers about the helpfulness of evaluations for each of the teaching tasks. We then computed the relationship between the perceived helpfulness of the evaluations for each task and the teacher's perception of the frequency of evaluation by the principal. Our gammas were all surprisingly high and positive, since our ambiguous question was expected to reduce the strength of the relationship. For Teaching Subject Matter, the gamma was .84; for Character Development it was .79; for Maintaining Control, .81; and for Record Keeping, .70. Thus we found a strong and positive relationship between the frequency of evaluation and the perceived helpfulness of evaluations for each of the four tasks. Teachers who think they are evaluated more often are more satisfied with the evaluation system and are more likely to believe it is helping them to do a better job as teachers.

A Comparison of Two Schools

Two schools in one district were selected for a more intensive examination. An effort was made to choose schools that differed widely on teacher responses regarding their confidence in the principal's leadership. Twelve teachers from one school, called "Able," and 22 from the other, called "Baker," were included in the study.

This comparison demonstrates the ways in which the processes we have analyzed above are synthesized in the real world. A description of these two schools does not avoid the problems of context and sample size, but it provides a glimpse of principals' successes and

failures with resultant perceptual differences among teachers.

The following material is presented to illustrate the diverse perceptions of teachers in the two schools. We asked, "Do you have any idea what criteria (standards) your principal uses to determine how well or poorly you are doing on each task or any part of it?" Table 9 reveals substantial differences between the responses of teachers in the two schools.

TABLE 9

Proportion of Teachers with High Knowledge of Criteria for Evaluation of Four Tasks

Task	Able School	Baker School
Teaching Subject Matter	.61	.27
Character Development	.69	.38
Maintaining Control	.76	.47
Record Keeping	.69	.33

Similar differences were also revealed in responses to questions that focused on the evaluation process. For instance, teachers were asked to indicate how important the evaluations of their principals were to them. All of the Able School staff answered "Extremely Important" or "Very Important" as compared with 68 percent of the faculty at Baker School. Table 10 reveals wide discrepancies between the two schools on the question: "How frequently do you learn your principal's evaluation of how well or poorly you are doing each task?"

TABLE 10

Proportion of Teachers Reporting Frequent or Very Frequent Evaluation of Four Tasks

Task	Able School	Baker School
Teaching Subject Matter	.84	.22
Character Development	.84	.46
Maintaining Control	.84	.22
Record Keeping	.53	.13

Large differences in level of teacher satisfaction are apparent in responses to the following question: "You have already been asked how satisfied you are with the way tasks are given, the way standards are set, the way decisions are made about the information needed for evaluating, and the way evaluations are made. In general, considering all these things together, how satisfied are you with the way work is assigned and evaluated for each task?" Table 11 reveals that teachers from Able School were considerably more satisfied than those from Baker School.

TABLE 11

Proportion of Teachers with High Satisfaction on Evaluation of Four Tasks

Task	Able School	Baker School
Teaching Subject Matter	.92	.13
Character Development	.92	.13
Maintaining Control	.92	.18
Record Keeping	.84	.18

Considerable differences in response to instability (internal pressure for change) measures were also found, as illustrated by Tables 12 and 13. It is apparent that for all tasks, teachers in Able School expressed dissatisfaction with and suggested changes in assignment or evaluation much less than did teachers in Baker School.

TABLE 12

Proportion of Teachers Dissatisfied with Assignment and Evaluation of Four Tasks

Task	Able School	Baker School
Teaching Subject Matter	.00	.36
Character Development	.08	.31
Maintaining Control	.00	.49
Record Keeping	.00	.31

TABLE 13

Proportion of Teachers Suggesting Changes in Assignment or Evaluation of Four Tasks

Task	Able School	Baker School
Teaching Subject Matter	.00	.40
Character Development	.08	.45
Maintaining Control	.00	.50
Record Keeping	.00	.13

In examining the responses of the two principals on their respective questionnaires and interviews, it is interesting to note that the

Able principal reported evaluating his teachers "Frequently," communicating his evaluations "Frequently," and "Always" indicating his dissatisfaction. He perceived that organizational rewards and penalties were extremely important to teachers and that evaluations were very influential in determining the distribution of rewards and penalties in his school.

In contrast, the principal of Baker School reported that he evaluated his teachers "Fairly Often," communicated his evaluations only "Occasionally," and "Occasionally" indicated his dissatisfaction. He saw organizational rewards and penalties as "Moderately" important to teachers and evaluations as only "Moderately" influential on the distribution of rewards and penalties in his school.

When asked what changes he suggested in the evaluation of teachers in his school, the Able principal indicated a desire for greater involvement on the part of the teachers, and identified self-evaluation as the ultimate goal. The Baker principal had no changes to suggest.

During the interview, the Able principal said that he knew what criteria and information were used by his superiors to evaluate his role, while the Baker principal was only aware of criteria for one task. The Able principal reported learning the superintendent's or assistant superintendent's evaluation of his performance "Frequently," while the Baker principal learned it only "Occasionally." At every level, therefore, the frequency of evaluation differed in the two schools, with corresponding differences in teacher satisfaction and instability behavior.

Conclusion

The comparison of the two schools has reinforced the pattern of results found by comparing 131 teachers and 33 principals. We found that evaluation by principals tended to be too infrequent to provide helpful guidance to teachers. About half of the teachers reported that they did not know the criteria they were being evaluated on or the information used to evaluate them. By contrast, nearly all the principals believed that teachers knew more about the criteria used and the information collected than teachers reported knowing.

These differences in perception were again obvious with respect to the communication of evaluations. Principals thought they were communicating more evaluations, positive or negative, than teachers reported receiving. Since (1) teachers were more satisfied when they received more frequent evaluations, and since (2) teachers thought evaluations more helpful when they received them more frequently, there seems little evidence that increased frequency of evaluation by principals would threaten the autonomy of teachers.

As our comparison of two schools showed, the current low frequency of evaluations in many schools provides too little aid for teachers. In general, professionals want freedom in their work and therefore do not want very frequent evaluations. But in schools today the evaluations are so infrequent that more frequent evaluations would provide helpful guidance and not threaten autonomy.

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